

# TILAPIA: TO EAT OR NOT TO EAT?

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## ABSTRACT

African cichlids Mozambique tilapia (*Oreochromis mossambicus*) and spotted tilapia (*Tilapia mariae*) were illegally introduced to Queensland waters in the late 1970's. Shortly thereafter the state government legislated both species as 'noxious', and implemented a no-take approach to management that is still enforced today. *O. mossambicus* is now established in 24 of 76 catchments throughout the state, largely restricted to the east coast. *T. mariae* has established in only four northern Queensland catchments. There is evidence of tilapia naturally spreading across Queensland, although colonisation is generally slow. Most new tilapia infestations are the result of human-assisted translocations occurring via illegal stocking, live bait escapees or ornamental fish dumping. Notwithstanding, there is still a significant amount of native waterways in Queensland that remain tilapia-free. Given the growing number of infested catchments, there is increasing pressure from the public to change noxious fish policy to allow consumption of tilapia, citing heavier fishing pressure leading to a reduction in numbers. While contemporary science does not indicate this method effectively reduces invasive fish biomass, new regulatory requirements around community. The General Biosecurity Obligation (GBO) has brought about mounting public pressure for the government to review its current policies regarding the possession and consumption of tilapia.